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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR CONSULAR AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

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April 17, 1981

MEMORANDUM TO: CA - Ambassador Diego C. Asencio

FROM: CA/OCS - James L. Ward, Acting JW/69

SUBJECT Briefing for Ambassador Deane R. Hinton (El Salvador)

General

In the wake of political and economic upheavals, the resident American population in El Salvador has shrunk somewhat and tourism has declined. The Department has a long-standing advisory recommending against travel to El Salvador. The volatile climate has impacted considerably on consular services, rendering operations more complex and consular forecasts subject to sudden change.

Emergency Services

Currently there are three U. S. citizens under arrest in El Salvador. One, charged with an immigration violation, is awaiting deportation. Another is charged with a drug related offense, while the third is charged with blackmail/extortion. Both of these cases are in the pre-trial stage. The Embassy is handling the cases appropriately.

An unusual and difficult case with which the Embassy is dealing involves the disappearance of a young freelance reporter, John J. Sullivan, Jr., on the day of his arrival in El Salvador last December. A separate detailed statement regarding this case is attached.

The Embassy has handled no significant financial and medical assistance cases recently.

Non-Emergency Services

The amount of non-emergency case work processed at the Embassy is low in volume. Although the work covers the entire gamut of non-emergency functions, there have been no significant problems in the Embassy's handling of cases involving acquisition or loss of nationality, property and estates claims, estates settlement, judicial services, child custody and federal benefits.

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As the security situation has deteriorated, however, the demand for certain consular services has increased. The requirement for notarials has soared, apparently due to the fear of resident Americans that documents which may be needed later may become unavailable due to destruction of municipal offices or to suspended services. Passport issuance and registration also has increased, as anxious people seek to keep their documentation current and their presence known to the Embassy.

One matter of concern to the Department involves personal property of U. S. citizens. In view of the political situation that obtains in El Salvador, some U. S. citizens may request the Embassy to store their personal property in the event that they depart the country. In order to avoid future difficulties, the Embassy should not accept any personal property from Americans seeking secure storage of valuables. The Department wishes to avoid another situation such as the Swiss deposit problem in Cuba.

The Federal Benefits Program appears to be operating effectively in El Salvador. According to the most recent figures available, the Embassy is distributing monthly about 452 Federal Benefit checks in excess of $96,000.

Attachment:

As stated

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ATTACHMENT

Welfare and Whereabouts - John Sullivan

The case of John J. Sullivan, a freelance reporter from Bogota, New Jersey, who disappeared in El Salvador after checking into the San Salvador Sheraton Hotel on December 28, 1980, has generated a considerable number of inquiries from his family, Congressional representatives and the media.

To date, the Embassy and the Salvadoran authorities have made extensive efforts to locate Mr. Sullivan. Embassy personnel have checked local hospitals and prisons, and have interviewed hotel personnel, taxi drivers, waitresses, media representatives, missionaries and airline personnel. In addition, there has been extensive local press coverage in El Salvador, including the publication of Sullivan's picture and description, as well as radio and television announcements asking for information about him.

The Embassy has also been in contact with the highest levels of the Salvadoran Government regarding their efforts to locate Mr. Sullivan. The President of the Salvadoran Government has personally assured the Embassy that every effort is being made to determine Mr. Sullivan's whereabouts, including a nationwide alert to try to locate him. Unfortunately, all efforts have thus far proved fruitless.

On Feb[illegible]ry 18, Mr. and Mrs. Sullivan met with Ambassador Asencio to discuss the disappearance of their son. Since that meeting the Department has been in daily contact, including weekends, with the family in order to keep them fully informed of any pertinent developments.

The Department has received a Freedom of Information request from Donna Igoe, Mr. Sullivan's sister. It is currently being processed.

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